

Chapter 14: Project Review Process

Introduction

Projects are one of the ways in which the Inyo-Mono IRWM Plan is implemented within the planning region (see Chapter 12 for a full discussion). The Round 1 Implementation Grant funded seven projects that focus on improving water quality, increasing water supply reliability, and/or upgrading antiquated infrastructure. More recently, the Round 2 Planning Grant is funding three projects that help to meet planning gaps in the region. The Inyo-Mono RWMG will continue to seek out projects that meet the most pressing needs in the region, as reflected in this Plan's Objectives and Resource Management Strategies (RMS; Chapter 7), and that also help to meet the Objectives, RMS, and Program Preferences of DWR and the California Water Plan (Chapter 1).

Each project that aims to be considered for funding will go through a two-step process. First, the project must be submitted to the general pool of projects using a newly-developed online upload form. Second, projects from the general pool that are ready to move forward for funding are put through a carefully-designed process of evaluation and ranking by the RWMG. Each of these steps is described below.

Projects Included in the IRWM Plan

The Inyo-Mono RWMG has an “open door” policy with respect to submitting and including projects in its IRWM Plan. This means that, other than requiring certain information to be provided along with each project submitted, projects are not filtered before including them in the Plan. The RWMG strongly feels that this policy allows a better assessment of the overall needs of the region with respect to water issues and funding and also provides more opportunity to combine and integrate similar projects. Filtering occurs when projects are being selected and ranked for funding.



Procedures for Submitting a Project to the IRWM Plan

Based on feedback received regarding the process used to submit projects for inclusion in the Inyo-Mono IRWM Phase I Plan, the process was substantially changed to better meet the needs of project proponents as well as the larger planning objectives of the region. In the Phase I Plan, project proponents simply emailed project descriptions and other basic information to Program Office staff. In working with other

IRWM regions, staff learned that online project submittal forms are used with success in several regions, and staff endeavored to create a similarly useful process for the Inyo-Mono region.

The new online upload form was created in early 2012 to meet the needs of the Phase II Plan and upcoming rounds of Implementation funding. The form is housed on the Inyo-Mono IRWM Program website and is password-protected to help ensure that fraudulent information is not submitted. Users who wish to submit a project using this form simply contact the Program Office for the password. Although any stakeholder with an interest in water management may submit a project using this form, only projects submitted or sponsored by RWMG Members will move forward for funding.

As mentioned above, this new online upload form is designed to meet several purposes. First, it provides relevant information concerning the project itself, including organizational contact information, project title and description, length of project, cost of project (including amount of funding needed and amount of funding already available), type of project (conceptual, planning, implementation), project location, communities and watersheds benefitted (including DACs), and relation to Inyo-Mono Objectives and RMSs. Secondly, the upload form aims to collect information that helps to determine how the Inyo-Mono projects meet State water planning objectives such as DWR Program Preferences and California Water Plan Strategic Objectives, RMS, and Integrated Water Management Benefits. This information may be provided to the State in summary form to better describe the project and finance needs of the Inyo-Mono region, as well as how the projects proposed to meet those needs also address State water planning priorities.

Not all fields in the project upload form are mandatory. Those that are required are marked with a red asterisk. The extensive information requested in the upload form requires that the project proponent has carefully considered the need for and design of the project and can relate the project to larger regional and Statewide planning objectives. Thus, the amount of time required to fill out the online form provides a first filter on the number of projects submitted. Extensive instructions are included at the top of the online form (<http://inyo-monowater.org/members/project-upload/>), and Program Office staff is available to answer questions and provide assistance. Furthermore, additional tips for successful project upload are provided on the website, along with a study guide (<http://inyo-monowater.org/members/>). A downloadable Word document that contains all of the questions in the upload form is also available on the website at the previous link. Alternatively, for stakeholders in the region that may not have access to the Internet, the Word document version of the submission form can be made available (and then be submitted) in hardcopy. An example of the appearance of the online upload form is shown in Figure 14-1.

Figure 14-1. Screenshot of online project upload form on Inyo-Mono IRWM website.

General Project Information

The questions below are designed to gather general project information

Project Title *

Project Description *

500 words or less

Estimated Project Duration (in Months) *

Please select the closest estimated time-frame for your project

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Total External Funds Needed (Grant Ask) *

Please enter numeric digits only (i.e. a \$50,000 amount would be entered as 50000)

Total Match Funding Available *

Please enter numeric digits only (i.e. a \$50,000 amount would be entered as 50000)

Procedures for Review of Projects for Inclusion in the IRWM Plan

All projects that meet the basic requirements of the project upload/submittal process described above are automatically included in the Inyo-Mono IRWM Plan. No filter is placed on this part of the process because the RWMG desires to assess and consider the full range of water-related needs in the planning region. Thus, potential project proponents are invited to submit projects that are (1) concept-only, (2) in the planning phase, or (3) shovel-ready (relevant for both planning and implementation projects). The RWMG has determined that it is important to maintain this “open-door” policy with respect to project submission so that there is a larger pool from which to pull projects for any given funding opportunity. Again, because project

proponents need to be able to relate their projects not only to Inyo-Mono Objectives and RMS, but also to Statewide planning priorities, projects are not submitted that do not have relevance to the Inyo-Mono planning process.

The more in-depth project review occurs when projects are considered for inclusion in a particular funding application. That process will be discussed later in this chapter.

Procedure for Communicating List of Projects

The Phase I Plan project list was completely re-created for the Phase II Plan. Program Office staff communicated with project proponents to request that they re-submit projects using the new project upload form, or if the project has already been completed or is no longer relevant, to communicate that with the staff. The project upload form was made available to potential project proponents in April, 2012. Projects that were submitted prior to June 22, 2012, are included in the Phase II Plan. This process resulted in 37 projects. The submission process was re-opened through September 30, 2012, in order to gather more project needs ahead of the Round 2 Implementation Grant application. These 13 additional projects were initially added to the IRWM Plan as an addendum to Chapter 15 that was approved by the RWMG in early 2013. The project list and accompanying analysis are described in Chapter 15. The online upload form will remain open for project submissions indefinitely; however, any additional projects that are submitted will not be added to the IRWM Plan until there is a formal amendment process initiated or a revision of the Plan takes place (see Chapter 5 for information on adding projects to the Plan).

Evaluation of Projects for Inclusion in Funding Applications

Project proponents who wish to put forward projects for a particular funding opportunity are subjected to rigorous evaluation and ranking processes. Combined, these processes help to determine which projects are ready to be submitted for funding and allow the RWMG to express its preferences and priorities with respect to implementing the IRWM Plan.

An extensive evaluation/ranking process and request for proposals was utilized for the Round 1 Implementation Grant in 2010/early 2011. Although the outcome of this process was a ranked list of projects that reflected the greatest needs in the region, there were many flaws in the implementation of the process. After the Round 1 Implementation Grant application was submitted in early 2011, Program Office staff collected feedback about the project evaluation/ranking process with the intention of improving the process in future funding rounds.

In early 2012, a working committee began meeting to address potential revisions to the project evaluation/ranking process. The committee started by reviewing the Round 1 process as well as the feedback collected from RWMG Members after the Round 1 Implementation Grant submission. Much of the original document was preserved in the new process. One major change that occurred early on was the development of project “bins” or categories. The RWMG was concerned that projects addressing ecosystem stewardship had difficulty competing with projects addressing basic water supply and quality needs. One way to alleviate this direct competition is by separating projects out into subject-based bins. The working committee recommended the creation of five project bins: Water Supply, Water Quality,

Ecosystem Stewardship, Stormwater and Flood Management, and Groundwater.

The working committee also suggested developing Technical Advisory Committees (TACs) for each project bin. This group of people would have expertise in the subject of that bin and would review, score, and rank only those projects in that bin. With the development of the final Round 2 evaluation/ranking process, it was decided that the bins would only be used for the first round of review by the TACs. After the TACs developed their recommended scoring of projects, RWMG Members would complete their own review and scoring of projects (or may accept the TAC's score for that project), and all of the projects would be considered together, regardless of bin. This revised process continues to be in effect for the Inyo-Mono IRWM Program. The overall process for scoring and ranking, as well as the pre-proposal template, can be found in Appendix E.

DWR prescribes several review factors that should be included in a RWMG's project evaluation and ranking process (see below for those factors relevant to the Inyo-Mono region). These review factors were included in both the Round 1 and Round 2 evaluation/ranking processes (see Appendix E for the Round 2 process document). These factors will continue to be considered in future evaluation/ranking processes:

- 1) How the project contributes to the IRWM Plan objectives
- 2) How the project is related to resource management strategies
- 3) Technical feasibility of the project
- 4) Specific benefits to critical DAC water issues
- 5) Environmental Justice considerations
- 6) Project costs and financing
- 7) Economic feasibility
- 8) Project status
- 9) Strategic considerations for IRWM Plan implementation
- 10) Contribution of the project in adapting to the effects of climate change
- 11) Contribution of the project in reducing greenhouse gas emissions as compared to project alternatives
- 12) Status of project proponent's IRWM Plan adoption

Project proponents are asked to provide information related to the review factors in a formal request by the RWMG and are given a deadline by which material needs to be submitted. Once all project information has been submitted, the RWMG Members then review the project information and score and rank the projects. Project rankings are submitted to the Program Office, which combines the rankings and develops an overall aggregate ranking to be approved by the RWMG during a regularly-scheduled (and public) meeting. The approved aggregate ranking is then used to shape the funding application.

Project review and ranking is a dynamic process, as regional and Statewide priorities shift, and as RWMG Members and Member representatives change, but this process should always reflect the most current thinking about water planning and management in the region. This will ensure that funding applications accurately and appropriately communicate the region's values.